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An uncommon Laboratory of Transculturality**

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Georg Wink

*Anus Mundi* or *Tout-monde*?<sup>1</sup>

French Guiana: An uncommon Laboratory of Transculturality

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There are very few places in the collective imagination that seem as remote as the region between the Amazon River and the Guianan coast. The region at the imagined edge of the world has always been a prominent projection surface for all kinds of utopian or rather anti-utopian imaginations. Initially, the most popular myth was the imaginary gold town Manoa on the shores of Lake Parime, residence of El Dorado, which became a European *topos* after Walter Raleigh's travel account from 1596. After the dramatic failure of the French colony project of Kourou from 1763 to 1767, the French part of Guiana lost its golden allure and was henceforth deemed a graveyard for Europeans. A new settlement program in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century –this time with prisoners– transformed French Guiana into a devil's island and a junkyard ("*dépotoir*") for altogether 100,000 outcasts, the last of whom only returned to France at the beginning of the 1950s (see Mam-Lam-Fouck, *Histoire de la société; Histoire générale*). Until today the proverbial breaking of stones in Cayenne remains in the French idiom "casser des cailloux à Cayenne", which is to be expected when caught at dark doings.

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<sup>1</sup> The term *Anus Mundi* is loaned from Alexander Smoltczyk's documentary *Der Wald ohne Schatten: auf der Suche nach letzten Orten dieser Welt* (Forest without Shadows: In Search for the last places in this world) from 1996; the term *Tout-monde* was coined by Édouard Glissant and is title of his most popular novel.

<sup>2</sup> The gold rush and Brazil's diplomatic triumph is the subject of probably the only work of Brazilian literature on

A blank spot on the map, the inhospitable “jungle hell” –yet another association of perdition– was once even considered as a toehold for a Nazi invasion in South America. Berlin zoologist Otto Schulz-Kampfenkel explored the terrain strategically in the 1930s, and his travel account *Rätsel der Urwaldhölle* (mystery of the jungle hell), which in 1938 was made into one of the most popular movies in Nazi Germany, was the base for invasion plans that were discussed in 1940, but never implemented (see Glüsing). After the failure of a plan for the settlement of 30,000 Algerian French (Glissant 179), French Guiana got its final destination and first economic relevance with the construction of the European air space center Kourou in 1975, today the base from which around half of all satellites are launched worldwide (Arianespace 1). However, as Europe’s gate to space, French Guiana is once more positioned on the edge of spatial imagination (Redfield 115).

The significance of this powerful discourse of the margin is yet to be explored in relation to the socio-economic, political, and cultural realities of this mythically charged place. Presumably, the internal perspective will differ, but is not expected to prevail against the hegemony of the dominant discourse. It seems rather peculiar, when Guianan poet Ernest Munier sings of his home as “France’s eldest daughter” (see Jones 393), since it is hardly known that French Guiana, officially seized by the Bourbons in 1604, is one of France’s oldest regions overseas, which can look back at a longer affiliation to France than, say, the regions Nord-Pas-de-Calais or Franche-Comté (Viatte 483). The statement surprises that in this region, France, the Caribbean, and Brazil not only border on each other, but have been culturally intermingling for centuries, and even more so within the past decades.

The political border of French Guiana is delineated on each Euro bill, but its existence is not the dominant reference for the people inhabiting the space, in spite of certain limits to mobility. An imagination beyond a national state refers predominantly to transboundary phenomena, for instance the stigma of the periphery, the shared colonial history, the confrontation between natural spaces and pioneer frontiers, the diversified and in part historical migration spaces of indigenous people, fugitive slaves (*marrons*), working migrants, and other border crossers. The

space of these imaginations is not a neutral container, but has been created via social discourses and practices. Lefèbvre (32, 42) as well as Soja und Appadurai, developing the former's concept further, differentiate a representation of space (by literature, historiography, cartography, administrative planning) from space as a mode of representation in which its "user" experiences and interprets its meaning. This discrepancy between fictional and experienced space is characteristic for the relationship between motherland and satellite in general. In the case of French Guiana it is particularly so because of the Guianan reception of francophone postcolonial concepts of cultural identification, which were above all constructed in the context of Caribbean islands, and therefore do not sufficiently consider the continental position of French Guiana, its neighbourhood to Brazil, the massive migration movements, and the differing dependency on the French motherland. In French Guiana, cultural reinterpretations of the experienced space are created in literary texts and distributed in the media (above all the daily newspaper *France-Guyane* and literary magazine *La Torche*). They move on the one hand between the respective national identity discourses (*francité, brasilidade*), and try on the other hand to reinterpret Caribbean cultural theories (*antillanité, créolité, créolisation*) and to apply them to their own space, reaching beyond the continental boundaries.

Regarding this cross-boundary imaginations, there is a research desideratum. This survey will contribute to filling this blank space, naming the most important starting points for a new research approach to French Guiana, and showing how this approach could not only be significant for this forgotten spot of land but could also contribute to the academic construction of cultural theory, as well as to the exploration of universal questions, especially the phenomena of migration and transculturality.

Most research on French Guiana in a regional context predominantly focuses on the various economic-political boundaries, which are in fact remarkably complex and result in a extraordinary image of extreme isolation. However, the focus could also be on the *space* created by the various boundaries, and the phenomena of *cultural* contact realized there in their

discursive representation. Several spaces can be imagined which go beyond the boundaries, above all that to Brazil. The following figure illustrates just that:

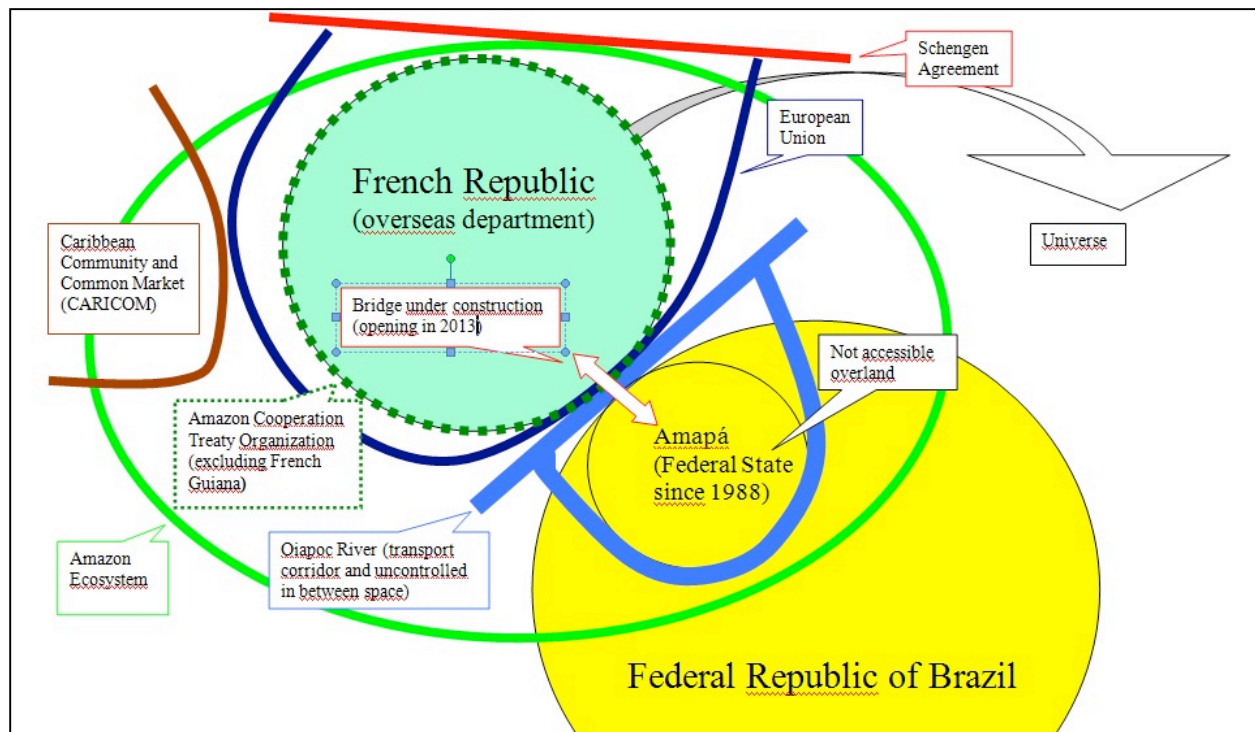


Figure 1 - French Guiana and its diverse boundaries

1) Historically, French Guiana is a remnant of ambitious conquest plans of the French Crown in South America (France Antarctique 1555-1567, Maranhão 1594-1615), which was maintained for the military securing of the southern edge of sugar plantations on the Antilles. Likewise, the Portuguese Crown had one of the largest colonial fortification in Latin America erected on the north shore of the Amazon –in what is Macapá today– for the strategic protection of the open northern edge. Although theoretically determined in the treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the border to Brazil along the Oiapoc River always remained disputed due to the complicated hydrography, hardly detectable in the landscape and therefore effectively uncontrollable. The area between the fortifications in Cayenne and Macapá, which are about 800 km apart, became an

interspace that was never officially colonized, a no-man's-land. Even when the border was shifted again and finally determined in 1901 by an international arbitrament in favour of Brazil – and that at the very climax of the short gold rush in the contested area (Police 82)<sup>2</sup>–, control over the area remained precarious in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Silva 424-425). In the penal colony French Guiana, the already low number of settlers decreased to about 27,000 by 1945 (Chevalier and Vizot 796). In Brazilian Amapá, barely 25,000 people were officially counted at the time (Drummond and Pereira 69). Nobody knows how many settlers actually lived in this vast region beyond any governmental structures. In 1946, French Guiana, together with the Caribbean islands Martinique and Guadeloupe, was granted the status of a *départements d'outre-mer* (DOM), a completely integrated part of the French state. Today, about 230,000 inhabitants are officially recorded. French Guiana is therefore the only remaining continental exclave of Europe and a remarkable historical exception. Brazilian Amapá on the other hand, just a little larger than French Guiana, became federal territory in 1943 and federal state in 1988, and counts about 620,000 inhabitants.

2) As DOM, French Guiana politically belongs to the European Union, and, like France, to the Euro zone. Transfer payments from the European Structural Funds amount to about 70 million Euros annually (Guianan budget is about 150 million Euros), which results in the highest standard of living in South America (cf. INSEE<sup>3</sup>). Apart from the space station, economic activities are almost exclusively limited to the tertiary sector. After the failure of larger enterprises in manganese and kaolin mining as well as in cellulose production –Daniel Keith Ludwig's megalomaniac project–, Brazilian Federal State Amapá, which is part of Mercosur via Brazil, today favours nature conservation and extraction economy. Different from other regions in Amazonia, extensive soy cultivation and lumbering could be prevented here (Drummond and Pereira 22). The adjacency of EU and Mercosur on the outermost periphery may not have an

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<sup>2</sup> The gold rush and Brazil's diplomatic triumph is the subject of probably the only work of Brazilian literature on French Guiana, the novel *Saraminda* (2000), written by former president José Sarney, who is still active in politics until today.

<sup>3</sup> See the Internet homepage of the French office for statistics: <<http://www.insee.fr>>.

economic relevance, but has found its symbolical representation: In 2002, the construction of a bridge across the Oiapoc River connecting the two economic blocks was bilaterally decided. Although –or maybe just because– the completion has been delayed over and over again (at present the initiation is scheduled 2013), the bridge serves first and foremost as a symbolic rapprochement for the Brazilian government. Its benefit for traffic is questionable; the Brazilian Oiapoque has merely 20,000 inhabitants, the road stretching the 600 km to Macapá is partially only a dirt road, and finally, Macapá is not really connected with the Brazilian road network. In French Guiana itself, the project is viewed critically as part of the Brazilian pioneer frontier, which is not just symbolic –in fact, Brazil is both initiator and, of course, builder of the project (Police 439).

3) Ecosystemically, French Guiana belongs to Amazonia. Thanks to the low degree of development, 83% of its surface is covered by rainforest (Gargominy 42). Regional politics are geared towards ecological sustainability, and French Guiana, where in the latest European election in 2009, 25% of the voters gave their ballot to the green list, is aiming at becoming the “Botanical Garden of France”. With a new, positively connoted function there is hope to promote tourism, which to date has hardly been a relevant sector. Amapá is also considered a testing area for the compatibility of development and nature preservation (Drummond and Pereira 88). In 2007, both sides agreed on establishing the largest rainforest conservation area on earth with the *Parc amazonien*, respectively the *Parque Nacional das Montanhas do Tumucumaque*, which covers a quarter each of the territories of French Guiana and Amapá. The region is threatened by about 8,000 Brazilian gold seekers, who are prospecting illegally in the French preservation area with serious consequences for the environment. The annual production of estimated 10 tons of gold worth around 350 million Euros is justified by the *garimpeiros*, but also by Brazilian media, with the unequal living conditions and the political anomaly of French Guiana (Martins,

“Literature” 154).<sup>4</sup> Thus, very subtly, geopolitical claims to Guianan territory are being stated here, which will be illustrated further down.

4) Regarding their population, French Guiana and Amapá form a historical migration space, within which the indigenous Palikur, Wayana and Wajãpi, as well as settlers, merchants, and above all fugitive slaves (*marrons* resp. Brazilian *quilombolas*) have been itinerant for centuries. In the no man’s land between two colonial systems, the population was not defined along colonial borders, but by a common “field of circulation of experiences” (Queiroz and Gomes 26-27). The informal trade between the Caribbean and the Amazon, the solidarity of slaves and the cooperation of slave owners, respectively, in the light of permanent fugitive movements from Brazil to the undeveloped hinterland (Bénot 14; see also Bezerra Neto) were the basis, according to Gilberto Freyre, of a stable if informal social order, which was in no way inferior in its contribution to the development of the peripheral regions of Brazil to the *bandeirantes*, who took over the hinterlands coming from São Paulo (Freyre 46; see also Cardoso). The people brought along “dangerous ideas”, especially after the revolutions in Haiti in 1791 and Cayenne in 1796 (Bénot 102ff.), as well as after the abolition of slavery in the French territory in 1848, which threatened the very basis of Brazil’s formal social order. In this context, the Portuguese occupation of Cayenne between 1809 and 1817 ensued in order to prevent a comprehensive slave revolution. Not without good reason, since border crossers were consistently involved in numerous uprisings in the north of Brazil, in particular the *cabanagem* in Pará in 1835-1840 (Queiroz and Gomes 35-36).

Remarkably, the division of the contested region along national borders at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century met with resistance, resulting in the attempt to give the interspace a politically independent form with the hitherto almost unexplored “Republic of Counani” (1904-1912, but the first attempt was in 1885-1891) (Reis 117; Mérian, 26ff.). The synthesis was symbolized in

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<sup>4</sup> In a documentary about illegal Brazilian gold seekers in French Guiana (Repórter Record, “O dia-a-dia dos garimpeiros”, broadcast on 31/05/2009), the seekers were granted that although they were acting illegally, they were legitimate in their service for the Brazilian homeland.



the flag of this forgotten republic, whose Brazilian green was adorned with the colours of the French tricolour.

The no-man's land was reduced by the division, but remained, for practical reasons, along the border rivers, until today the only traffic corridors. In the course of Brazil's development of Amazonia in the 1950s, the green border became an important part of the plans of Brazil's national security. Military strategians feared an international threat to Amazonian resources, and seriously considered a geopolitically justified annexation of the Guianas in 1961, which was supported by President Jânio Quadros (Police 83ff.). Fortunately, these plans were shelved after Quadros' sudden resignation, which hitherto remains unexplained, so that locking horns with De Gaulle's nuclear power was averted. Instead, the open flank was armed defensively, most recently in the gigantic project initiated in 1985 of a so-called northern trench and in the surveillance via satellite. The potential threat under the key word "internationalization of Amazonia" is still a relevant issue in Brazil's security policy.<sup>5</sup> In the recent past, France has started to control the border, in order to fight illegal immigration and the actions of Brazilian gold panners (Chaumet 3). The surveillance of the territory effectively goes on beyond the border region, so that illegal immigrants to French Guiana who leave the interspace risk deportation (Simonian and Ferreira 240) –annually, over 1,000 Brazilians are affected (Pinto 110; Ganger fig. 3). Due to bureaucratic obstacles, also *amérindiens* or *marrons*, who are actually born as French citizens, may end up being *sans-papiers* (Dubois 69-70; on the specific situation on the border to Surinam see Campos França). A space that was imagined nationally homogenous is therefore fragmented. It is symptomatic of the situation that recently, Brazilian borderers on the numerous islands of the Oiapoc river have become victims of eviction and deportation activities of the French constabulary, although they have verifiably not settled on French territory (Police 316 f.; see also Capiberibe). It seems to be the attempt to create an unambiguous border strip by way of intimidation, in spite of protests from a highly sensitive Brazilian diplomacy.

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<sup>5</sup> Curiously enough, robbery of resources in the region began in 1727 with the adventurous stealing of coffee saplings from French Guiana, which became the foundation of the Brazilian coffee trade (Taunay 350).

The difficulty to define French Guiana as a homogenous space in its political boundaries lies not just in its borders, but also in its high ethnical diversity. In relative numbers, French Guiana is one of the most important immigration spaces of the world. Socio-ethnologically, the population is subdivided into *métropolitains* (10%), *créoles* (30%), *amérindiens* (2%), and the former immigrants from Laos and China (2%) as well as Surinam (6%) (see Chérubini).<sup>6</sup> The latter group, Aluku or Boni originating in African, overlaps with the aforementioned *marrons*, who traditionally live along the entire border (Cleaver 22-23).<sup>7</sup> Around 50% of the population are new legal and illegal immigrants, predominantly from Brazil (20%), but also from Haiti and Surinam (Police 33). This wave of immigration began with the construction of the space station in 1975 and was boosted in the 1980s by the economic crisis in Brazil and political crises in Surinam und Haiti (Alvarez 13-14). The high cost of living in French Guiana, which is about a third above the French average, aggravates the building of a livelihood, and only a regulated residence status entitles to receive aid from social transfers (Arouck 77).<sup>8</sup> The Euro as currency, social security and not least the hope to migrate to continental Europe –“real” Europe– which is impeded by the exclusion of French Guiana from the Schengen agreement, are some of the most important motivations for immigrants, with the imagination of an “Eudorado”.<sup>9</sup> The only migration from Guiana to Brazil, which is of highly symbolic significance, is that of the indigenous peoples. While they are *citoyens* like everybody else in French Guiana –as long as they are registered, otherwise they become *sans-papiers*–, thanks to the affirmative indigenous policy of Brazil in the 1990s, they own the rights to five demarcated *terras indígenas* in Amapá,

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<sup>6</sup> Since the French census does not consider ethnical criteria, all data are based on case studies and can therefore only be understood as approximated values.

<sup>7</sup> Because of a lack of statistical surveys in the inaccessible woodlands, according to Price and Price (84), the number of *marrons* may be significantly higher, at 20% of the overall population.

<sup>8</sup> Financial aid for securing the livelihood, the *Revenue de solidarité active* (RSA) amounts to 466,99 € a month for an adult (not including support for rental charges and benefits for children). To compare: the official Brazilian minimum wage at present converts to 255 € a month.

<sup>9</sup> See the Police title from 2010. The mythical term “Eldorado” and the neologism “Eudorado” are homophones in Brazilian Portuguese.

covering about 8% of the state (López Garcés 94).<sup>10</sup> The phenomenon of immigration via the green border is the most important consequence of the *continentalité*, and distinguishes French Guiana, demographically the most dynamic and at the same time the poorest region of France, from the *îles*, where at present, instead of a comparative immigration, only emigration and a stagnating population can be detected.

Therefore, it is its various overlapping spaces that are characteristic for French Guiana, depending on the perspective of the discipline that analyzes it. Highly conspicuous is the special significance as a migration space. For the academic field of literary and cultural studies, the question prevails which significance this space has in its cultural representations.

French Guiana, with its back to South America and in complete economic dependency on the motherland, is keeping a close connection with France, which is termed *océanisation*. Statesmen like Félix Éboué, who was the most famous “overseas patriot” during the *résistance*, or Gaston Monnerville, president of the Council from 1947 to 1968, stand as an example for the loyalty to the *mère-patrie*, although its benevolence was never certain, at least not until the construction of the space center (Dubois 71). The DOM is bound to the nation, not just politically and structurally, but by a massive cultural *francisisation*, and thus separated from Brazil, which is also a place of strong national discourses. Both national states have a homogenizing effect on their literatures and media, and even on the undefined interspace, where for instance a separation can be observed of Portuguese- and French-speaking groups among the younger generation of indigenous people; at the same time an integration of the different language families of the Arawak, Karib and Tupi can be detected within the national borders (see Paganotti and Gurgel 37). In spite of the spatial proximity, a cultural dialogue between the neighbouring states on the national level is only emerging, say, via the presence of Guianan writers at Pan Amazonian book fairs in Manaus and Belém, or in academic cooperations. Quite significantly, the strong symbol of a bridge across the Oiapoc river, which has always been traversed and crossed naturally and

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<sup>10</sup> See Assis on indigenous policy in Amapá. See ENA (17) on minority policies in the French state. In French Guiana, a certain lobby group for the indigenous has been forming since the 1980s, however not with an influence comparable with the situation in Brazil (Cleaver 21-22).

effectively with vessels, refers to an integration between Brasília and Paris as an important metaphor for the targeted economic integration of the two powers, but not of the region.

Postcolonial or decolonial discourse of the francophone Caribbean as well as Brazilian dependency discourse position French Guiana and Amapá as part of Latin America, or within the asymmetrical world system as “Third World.” In the DOM, the *départementalisation* was recognized as a perpetuation of dependency structures, an isolation in the Caribbean area, and, because of financial transfers, as most dangerous form of neo-colonialism (Glissant 60ff., 184). Therefore, leading intellectuals from Martinique and Guadeloupe are rejecting the status until today, and instead suggest the formation of an associated state (modelled after Puerto Rico) and, first and foremost, demand the political and economic integration into the Caribbean (CARICOM) (Chamoiseau et al. 16 ; see also Bernabé et al.). The *francisation* was also criticized as colonial mimesis and estrangement (Glissant 53). Emancipatory concepts like *négritude* –the recognition of colonialization as destruction instead of a coalescing cultural contact, and the demand for a consciousness of an African identity, as represented by Aimé Césaire (9-10) and tendentially also by Frantz Fanon– were helped to shape by Guianan intellectuals like Léon-Gontran Damas (Warner 5). Just as important for French Guiana was the later critique of *négritude*, which was further developed since the 1960s by thinkers like Édouard Glissant and later Patrick Chamoiseau to the concepts of *antillanité* and *créolisation* and *créolité* –as an attempt to found a Caribbean discourse, which is decolonialistic, but does not in the negation reproduce new essentialist, auto-exotic and assimilatory concepts (Fleischmann 325). The demand to recur to Creole roots in memory and imagination, say, by the inscription of the “non-dit” and the performative “histories” of orality and the artistic –not naturalistic– appropriation of the Creole languages, was especially prominent in the *Éloge de la créolité* in 1989 (Bernabé et. al.), and was downright paradigmatic in the award-winning novel *Texaco* (1992) by Patrick Chamoiseau. This demand is also realized in Guianan literature (Glissant 165; Chamoiseau 157-158; Bernabé et. al. 39).

Beyond the influence of the French motherland (*francité*), the impact of the francophone Caribbean (*créolité*) and the entire postcolonial context are of high cultural significance. However, both sides neglect in their interpretations the *continentalité* of French Guiana, its close connection with the region stretching to the Amazon, illustrated by the various different spaces, which actually has to do with the internal hierarchy of the DOM in which the islands have a more dominant position (Cleaver 26). The continentality of French Guiana manifests itself on a cultural level in the following aspects:

1) French Guiana corresponds neither with the geographic nor the economic archetype of *antillanité*. Instead of a limited space of insularity or a fragmented archipelago (Fleischmann 318), the characteristic feature is exactly the vagueness of the borders and the existence of a *hinterland*; therefore, French Guiana, much more than the Antilles, corresponds with the idea of an “anti-space” (Glissant 276). Instead of a plantation economy based on slave labour, a subsistency economy and an economic dependency on the motherland was dominant already before the *départementalisation*, and the current growth sectors tourism and EU banana export that are relevant for Guadeloupe and Martinique seem to pass French Guiana (Fleischmann 318).<sup>11</sup> In several economic key areas, the difference between French Guiana and the Antilles is larger than between the latter and France (see INSEE).

2) The *marron* as archetype and as “the only popular hero of the Antilles” (Glissant 104) not only has a literary presence in French Guiana, but is part of the demographic diversity, just like the *amérindiens* (see Chalifoux 36). The resistance of an “intellectual *marronage*” (Condé 20) in French Guiana has to be viewed in connection with the social resistance of marginalized *marrons* in everyday reality. In the light of linguistic and demographic heterogeneity of the population in a migration space, Creole languages always had a higher status in French Guiana than on the Antilles (e.g. at school), so that the situation of diglossia highly differs (Cleaver 37). French

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<sup>11</sup> Fewer than 2% of French slave trade, altogether 15,000 people, went to French Guiana, (Geggus 136). Guianan blacks are descendants of immigrated *marrons* from Surinam and of fugitive slaves from Brazil, and migrants of the present time.

Guiana is furthermore viewed as the region with the most linguistic Africanisms in the New World (Yelvington 230-231).

3) In French Guiana politics, independence efforts are only marginally represented.<sup>12</sup> Other than the Antilles, French Guiana is not only dependent on the motherland, but is also exposed to the expansion pressure of the seventh largest economy in the world, even if Brazil as part of the “Third World” is not traditionally suspected to be imperialistic (Schwarzbeck 137). However, it has proved to have imperialistic tendencies several times –as could be shown above– and has even tried to label its hegemonial advances with a supposed “liberation of Guiana from the colonial power of France” (Police 112113). Under these circumstances, a realistic option for independence does not exist.

The aspects outlined here find no consideration in the mentioned postcolonial discourses – possibly, because they have been appropriated by the discourse of the motherland as an implied negative projection for “maintaining a French identity.” French Guiana is therefore exemplary for the aforementioned discrepancy between the representation of space, constructed by a dominant discourse from the motherland and against it, and the performative spaces of representation.

It is the very specifics of French Guiana that could provide the possibility to reformulate these discourses and their concepts, and thus facilitate emancipation from both *francisisation* and *créolisation*. At present it seems that the concept of a “demographic laboratory” (Houdaille 267), which was developed in the context of the Creole islands –including cultural hybridity as *identité rhizome* instead of an *identité racine*, an open process structure as *fragmentation* and *errance*, and not least the relational globality of the *Tout-monde* (Glissant 35 ff., 176)– can be applied particularly well to French Guiana. The shared history of the region, transnational population groups, similar problems (pioneer frontier) and solutions (nature preservation) offer a variety of starting points for a transcultural and regional interpretation, which has hitherto only been

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<sup>12</sup> At the regional elections in 1998, the party *Mouvement de décolonisation et d’émancipation sociale* (MDES) got 8,6% of the votes (three seats). In 2004 they got 6,5% (no seat) and in 2010 in alliance with the popular left party Walwari of Christiane Taubira, they got one seat. The agreement with the rejected EU constitution at the 2005 referendum was a peak in France with 60%. Data are available on the homepage of the ministry of the interior at <[http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a\\_votre\\_service/elections/resultats](http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sections/a_votre_service/elections/resultats)>.

expressed by subaltern discourses from this supposed no-man's land. This interpretation could emancipate the space from projections, which all construct a marginal position (if as paradise, cemetery, hell, door to space, or outermost bastion of France). Moreover, it could represent a balance to the traditional national assimilation models of France and Brazil, which are in fact very similar. Both are officially colour blind and do not grant any special treatment to minorities, but in return offer the inclusion in a mythically inflated community that is imagined as homogenous (Fleischmann 317). However, these national grand narratives have been relativised recently, for example by the founding of a ministry for the development of an *Identité nationale* (which is not self-evident any more), or by debated *affirmative actions* based on ethnicity (e.g. a quota system) in Brazil. Modern France as “République métisée” (Dubois 76) and the DOM as “creuset de races” (see Mam-Lam-Fouck) are not too far from Brazil anymore, which invented *mestiçagem* as a foundation myth of the amalgamation of three races. Curiously enough, it is exactly these concepts in their national self-reference that have a separating effect on the region.

To return to the symbolic bridge across the Oiapoc river: the metaphor of a bridge always carries a positive connotation, since it connects people and cultures. It seems hard to imagine a negatively connoted bridge. However, the pleasant metaphor proves to be problematic, since it implies that what is now connected was separate before. In research on so-called migration literature, the phenomenon is well-known, that a “bridge between cultures” that is projected onto many works, above all defines the “cultures” –and thus divides. The region between Cayenne and Macapá has never been separated. I would argue that the transnational and rhizomatic rivers as symbol for the connection between two national river shores would describe the region much more accurately than a bridge.

One of the first signs of the discursively powerful construction of a concept of *guyanité* which might actually represent the specifics of the complex border region was an academic symposium held in Cayenne in 2004 with the title *Qu'est-ce que l'identité Guyanaise?*, which was complemented by an open panel: *Parlons de Nous: La question de l'identité en Guyane* (see Ureña Ribeiro). However, this *guyanité* would have to consider the evident internal subalternity

of people migrating from even poorer countries, additionally to the existing historical minorities. This subalternity is indeed viewed as problematic in French Guiana, in part because of the pushing of the pioneering frontier into protected nature spaces, but also, by some nationalists including representatives of the *Front National*, as a “planned genocide,” who polemicise not against *marrons* or indigenous people, but against Brazilian and Haitian immigrants (Chérubini 251). In the presidential elections in 2007, Sarkozy’s unrealistic announcement to secure Guianan territory by a special police unit actually helped him win the majority in French Guiana. As expected, a strengthened control of migration led first and foremost to a systematic discrimination against French citizens of an African phenotype (Dubois 67). The groups called *communautés de base*, where representations of a Guianan identity are negotiated, exclude both *métropolitains* –dispatched state workers called “chasseur de primes” because of the 40% additional pay– and new immigrants (Cleaver 20; Jolivet 14). This exclusion can hardly bear up in the future, considering political realities and demographic prognoses.

Consequently, it is highly significant to ask which models of cultural synthesis, and which representations of space can be developed by an already highly diversified society, which identifies itself in opposition to Europe and in community with the Caribbean as Creole, but is confronted with a permanent flux of immigration from the “Third World” and Brazilian expansion efforts. A reinvigoration of *océanisation* can already be observed, which has led to a further nationalisation of transnational groups like the Guianan indigenous. Noticeable and even more interesting seems the negotiation of new transnational identifications. On an official level, by the remembrance of the transcultural history of the border region, on a performative level at the carnival in Cayenne and other festivities, where competing symbols of identity are increasingly combined (Chérubini 146 ff.). Could this be the basis for the concept of a new interspace, which would mean another step away from the formerly valid container concept?

In French Guiana literature, this negotiation process is in full swing. Guianan writers were among the first to reinterpret collective memory, like Serge Patient in the historical novel *Le Nègre du gouverneur* (1978), which retells the story of the legendary character of D’Chimbo, a



19<sup>th</sup> century outlaw and popular hero of African origin. André Paradis' early essays *Tiers-Mort* (1975) and *Indépendance pour la Guyane* (1977) as well as the novels *L'année du fromager* (2000), *Le soleil du fleuve* (2002) and *Des hommes libres* (2005) contain a critical rereading of two dominant discourses: the numerous historical travel accounts of European authors<sup>13</sup> and the literary records of French Guiana, which were created in the context of the comprehensive cultural theories of francophone Caribbean.<sup>14</sup> The inclusion of orality and the artistic recreation of the Creole languages postulated in these theories is realised in the work of Élie Stéphensons, which has been academically analysed by Florence Martin: In the bilingual drama –in Creole and in a French translation– *La nouvelle légende de D'Chimbo suivi de Massak* (1996), the aforementioned popular hero dominates the discourse on stage.

Numerous works of prose and poetry by younger writers, some of which are collected in André Paradis' recently published *Brèves de savane* (2011), are dealing with the transcultural present of French Guiana. In Bernard Montabo's narration "L'incendie de la bibliothèque", a Kafkaesque dialog evolves between a fussy librarian and an inhabitant of the interspace, about the inevitable regulations, presumably created in Paris, for the issuance of a library card. Laurene Belrose's "Madame Cléante n'ira pas au cimetière" empathetically illustrates the lot of marginalised Haitian fugitives in French Guiana, while "Mosaïque aurifère" by Sylviane Vayaboury sketches the reality of Brazilian gold seekers in the border region. These are but a few examples for the new orientation towards issues that examine the diversities of Guianan reality. Not as a projected terminus for European neuroses, but as a vital place where the usual paradigms do not seem to fit anymore, and where in a phase of social changes, a search for a new communality can be observed, which is rooted out exactly in the transcultural connections. In these representations, the specific circumstances of French Guiana do not seem to evoke the curse

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<sup>13</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh (1596): *The discoverie of the large rich, and bewtiful empyre of Guiana*, Luis-Ange Pitu (1805): *Voyage a Cayenne, dans les deux Amériques et chez les anthropophage*, Henri Coudreau (1853): *Chez nos Indiens. Quatre années dans la Guyane française* (1853), Jules Crevaux (1883): *Voyages dans l'Amerique du Sud*.

<sup>14</sup> Especially the first Creole novel of Guianan author Alfred Parépou, *Atipa* (1885), as well as the poetic manifestos of Léon-Gontran Damas (*Pigments* 1937, *Retour de Guyane* 1938/1972) and Bertène Juminer (*Les Bâtards* 1961, *Au seuil d'un nouveau cri* 1963, *La revanche de Bozambo* 1968, *Les héritiers de la presqu'île* 1979, *La fraction de seconde* 1990).

of the *Anus Mundi*, but provide inspiring elements for a reinterpretation, which may not only be relevant for the forgotten appendage of Europe, but also for today's Europe itself, where the changes resulting from immigration call for the creation of new cultural meaning. But maybe this is yet another figment of utopian imagination, projected in the opposite direction.

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